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Daily Press (Newport News, Virginia) · Sun, Sep 2, 1951 · Page 31
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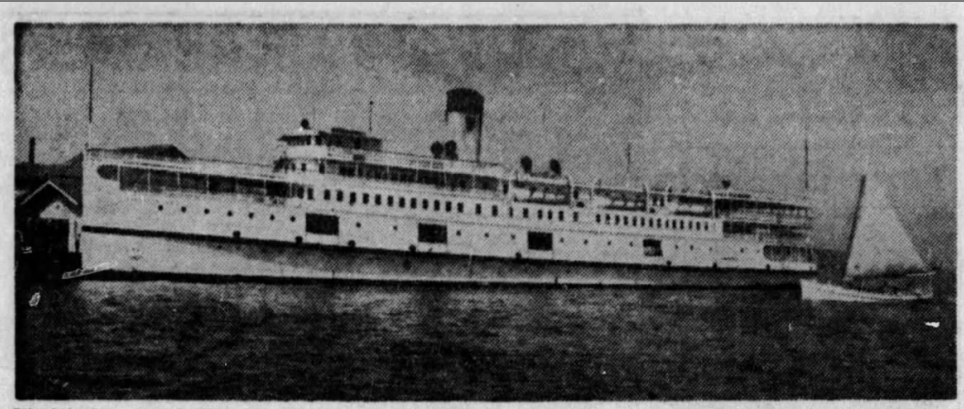

Virginia Lee at Old Point in 1936. When converted into the Holiday this vessel underwent changes. And now as she is being converted into a passenger and car ferry at the local shipyard, even more drastic structural changes are taking place.

# Steamer Virginia Lee Has Returned Here For Overhaul Before New Duty

An old friend has returned to the Peninsula after an absence of almost ten years. This is the former steamer Virginia Lee which operated between Cape Charles, Old Point and Norfolk for the N. Y. P. & N. R. R. as a ferry 14 years. And although under the guise of a new name and a strikingly different outside appearance, she is now undergoing even more drastic changes at the local shipyard before resuming her duties in this general area.

The Virginia Lee has had a varied career since she slipped down the ways of the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Company at Quincy, Mass., in 1928. She was built especially for the N. Y. P. & N. R. R. and served on the route across the lower Chesapeake Bay until sometime in 1942. In the latter year she was acquired by the United States government and turned over to Great Britain for use in an expected invasion of Axis Europe. With a number of other bay and sound steamers she was taken to Halifax, Nova Scotia, enroute to Europe. But while under a skeleton crew at Halifax, severe cold caused her pipes to freeze, doing considerable damege. As a result she was returned to our government.

**GOES TO BRAZIL**

After repairs had been made, she was sent to Brazil in May 1943 to serve in the rubber trade in the Amazon River. Her duties were to transport American and Brazilian rubber and engineering specialists and native workers to the plantations. For about five years she plied the Amazon. In 1948 she returned to the United State partly under her own power and the rest of the way in tow.

Sold to B. B. Wills, an operator of a number of excursion steamers, she was tied up in Baltimore. Here her steam engine was removed and two 1600 HP GM diesel engines installed. Renamed Holiday she was to start a new career as a luxury excursion vessel.

During the Summer season of 1949 and 1950 the Holiday was taken to Boston to operate between that port and Provincetown in competition with the Boston Belle of the Wilson Line. There was keen rivalry between the two boats and a price war and many promotional ideas were put into effect in an effort to wrest passengers from one another.

In February 1951, the Holiday made the front page of the newspapers when she attempted to sail down the Atlantic coast from Baltimore to Miami, where she planned to enter into the excursion trade. In a position between Wimble Shoal gas buoy and Diamond Shoals Lightship the vessel's starboard steering cable broke. A distress call was sent out and the Coast Guard responded. But it was more than 24 hours later before she was located after drifting helplessly in an 80 mile per hour gale which carried away several of her lifeboats. In tow of the cutter Cherokee she was taken into Morehead City, N. C., where she received temporary repairs to enable her to return to Baltimore.

Last May 29, the Wilson Line purchased the Holiday for the account of the Virginia Ferry Corporation to operate between Little Creek and Kiptopeke as a passenger and car ferry. She was taken to the Little Creek terminal where preliminary steps of the conversion were started.

While at Little Creek, a staff member of The Mariners' Museum visited the vessel. Seeing the nameboard still in place atop the pilot house, and realizing that they would fall into disuse since the vessel would be renamed for her new duty, he received permission to remove one to serve as an exhibit at the museum.

This was the beginning of a trek which is detailed to bring out the eagerness with wihch maritime items are sought out by some members of the museum's staff. Desiring to take the nameboard with him, and having no transportation of his own, he mounted a public bus with the seven foot board for the trip into Norfolk. The driver hesitated at first but consented to place the nameboard in a luggage compartment. In due time, the city was reached and thus started the second leg of the trip to Newport News.

Knowing Captain Eaton of the Old Bay Line's steamer District of Columbia, the staff member turned the nameboard over to him to deliver to Old Point Comfort. But since passengers are not carried between Norfolk and Old Point, the bearer of the board had to take the bus to Willoughby and the ferry from there to Old Point.

**ANOTHER PROBLEM**

Upon his arrival at the steamer dock, he found the nameboard awaiting him. Now the problem was to get the item to Newport News, its final step towards the Museum. Once again the public bus system was called upon. Getting on the bus without driver opposition, the staff member placed the nameboard under the long rear seat and was off to Newport News.

This is just a case of taking immediate advantage of acquiring material at the time it is available, for such items, of no monteary value but of extreme interest as exhibits, are so easily discarded by the disinterested. The staff of the museum is conscious of this and even though transportation problems may arise, they are sometimes overlooked to guarantee acquisition of the material for the museum. It might also be pointed out that this particular staff member is in a department of the museum having no connection with the exhibits, into which category the nameboard would enter.

Back to the Holiday, this vessel was taken to the local shipyard in June and is now undergoing conversion. Upon completion of the work, she will be renamed, probably Accomac, and will resume her career in the lower Chesapeake.—R. H. B.

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Aug 25, 2025

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